

HURRICANE MITCH RECONSTRUCTION UPDATE



USAID/Nicaragua Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction Program

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|---------------------------------|---------|
| (U.S. Millions of Dollars) | \$103.6 |
| Public Health | 30.6 |
| Economic Reactivation | 53.5 |
| Disaster Mitigation | 6.6 |
| Education | 4.5 |
| Municipal Infrastructure | 2.9 |
| Transparency and Accountability | 1.0 |
| Food Aid | 4.5 |



Departments of Nicaragua
Affected by Hurricane Mitch

COMMUNITIES RECEIVE TRAINING IN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

El Pellizco, Nicaragua—When the torrential rains from Hurricane Mitch caused rivers and causeways to overflow, members of this community fled to the safest place they could think of. At that moment, the two-room Jose Manuel Tenorio Elementary School seemed like a good choice.

“The people had to be lowered across the causeway with ropes in order to get here,” said Maria Eudalia Andrade, the school’s teacher. And while the inside of the school stayed dry, the area around it became covered with water trapping those who had sought refuge there. “We now know that this school is considered a risk area and that we need to get to higher ground in case of an emergency,” said Andrade.

Residents of this “at risk” community, located almost at the foot of the San Cristóbal Volcano, are now



With the active San Cristóbal Volcano looming in the background, the community of El Pellizco is located in an “at risk” area for natural disasters.



El Pellizco community representatives working on emergency plans during workshops on disaster preparedness sponsored by USAID through the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescents Societies.

better informed on protecting themselves after attending a series of disaster preparedness workshops conducted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCS). The IFRCS received \$310,000 from USAID to conduct the workshops in 100 communities. Located in 10 Hurricane Mitch-affected municipalities, these communities are considered “at risk” for future natural disasters. Approximately 3,000 people received disaster response training through the program.

El Pellizco, located in the northwest department of Chichigalpa, was heavily affected by Hurricane Mitch. Ulises Hernandez recalls how he and his family had to evacuate their home at the last minute. “We fled the house around midnight with

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COMMUNITIES RECEIVE TRAINING...

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water up to our waists,” said Hernandez. “We almost lost our two children.”

Almost all homes in the community were flooded, wells and latrines were destroyed or damaged and many residents lost crops and livestock. The road connecting the community with the main highway was impassable and when the water subsided, the road remained seriously damaged.

Several USAID-funded projects are helping to repair the damage in El Pellizco. A Food for Work program, through Save the Children, has repaired the access road and is working on other road repairs and building retaining walls to prevent future flooding. Many residents are provided temporary employment in the project, receiving food rations while working to improve the community. USAID has also repaired and re-equipped two primary schools serving El Pellizco. The Fatima elementary school also received a new roof, doors and windows.

However, even though the people of El Pellizco are rebuilding their community, they now realize that they remain vulnerable to other natural hazards. Through the IFRCS workshops they have taken steps to protect the community.

About 29 members from El Pellizco attended the three USAID/IFRCS workshops on disaster prevention, emergency preparedness and maintaining healthy households. As a result of the workshops, El



President of the emergency committee, Eloy Reyes, displays a map of the community that indicates risk points and safe areas.

Pellizco has formed an emergency committee and now has a map of the community indicating areas of high risk and safe areas for evacuation. The emergency committee organized meetings and visited households to inform residents of safe evacuation sites and procedures.

“Now everyone knows where they should go in case of an emergency,” said Eloy Reyes, president of the committee. Reyes keeps a copy of the risk map at his home, centrally located in the community. If there is a need to evacuate, the church bell and school bell will sound the alarm. Practice drills have already been done in the community.

“We still lack emergency supplies and first aid kits but we’ll use whatever we have, tractors or horses, to get people to a safe place.”

Children in the community’s three schools have also been instructed on emergency procedures and have practiced evacuations. Like other students in her class, eight-year-old Ana Elizabet Reyes knows what to do in case of an emergency: “We have to leave and go to another house.”



The curriculum for school children in El Pellizco includes disaster preparedness and practicing emergency procedures.

Disaster Mitigation

With a budget of \$6.6 million USAID is helping to identify and mitigate areas of high risks for natural disasters. This effort has included construction of retaining walls and dikes that will help prevent flooding and erosion. About 300,000 tree saplings are being distributed to farmers to stabilize watersheds. A total of 229 communities have been trained in disaster prevention.



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